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2 [MINISTRY OF TREASURY, ECONOMICS
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LOCAL GOVERNMENT DIVISION

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AN ALPHABETIC FILING SYSTEM
SUITABLE FOR A SMALL MUNICIPALITY

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INTRODUCTION

Municipalities, in recent times, have witnessed a substantial increase in the amount of information they handle. Although much of it is generated by the municipality, most of it comes from outside. Some of this information can be read and discarded, but a large percentage is probably kept for future reference. This information may be filed with little thought to the filing system that should be used. After all, most of the information handled will only fill one or two filing cabinets. It is only when certain information is requested by council, other staff or the general public and cannot be found that the need for an effective filing system is recognized. Therefore, as the amount of information handled by a municipality increases, it may be more and more important to ensure that if it is to be kept by the municipality it not be misfiled, misplaced or lost.

As an example, let's take this bulletin. If you find it of no value, you may discard it and there is no filing problem. But if you want to keep it, how will you file it in order to find it later? It could be filed several ways, such as alphabetically by title (under "A"); by subject (under "Filing System" or "Records Management"); by author (under "Ministry of Treasury, Economics and Intergovernmental Affairs"); or by date ("April 1978"). The one that is chosen will depend on the needs of the municipality but a simple, effective and easily implemented filing system will go a long way to assist in ensuring that information is not misplaced.

The alphabetic filing system will be described in this bulletin since it is popular among small municipalities and is easy to implement. It can especially apply to a centralized filing operation such as that found in the clerk's or clerk-treasurer's office. It does not apply to the filing of official records of the municipality such as the minutes of the council, the originals of by-laws or the general ledger, since those records are maintained in a way that complies with the requirements of The Municipal Act.

The particular filing arrangement that is described is not the only one that could apply to the municipality. It may not even be the best. Therefore this system should only be considered a guide or an example to use in setting up or reviewing your own system.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before choosing any kind of filing system for your office, there are two important aspects that should be carefully considered. The first relates to access and the other to the method of classification that is to be used.

Access

Access refers to the way a person can obtain information from the filing arrangement. Access can be direct or indirect. By direct access one can use the filing arrangement without the aid of an index. (The example attached as an appendix at the end of this bulletin is a filing arrangement that does not require an index.) By indirect access one must first use an index to select the right file. If the example used only numbers or a combination of letters and numbers as file references, the user would have to refer to an index before he was able to select a file.

Indirect access has the advantage of increasing file security since anyone wanting information in the files must first consult the index. It also simplifies the placing of filing directions on the information to be filed since it uses numbers, letters, or letters and numbers instead of longer titles. It has the disadvantages of slower retrieval, since the user has to first go to an index, and greater chance of misfiling due to mistakes in coding.

Direct access has several advantages; there is no need to set up an index, anyone can get information from the files easily, it saves time in filing and retrieving information, and the titles tell the user immediately what is in the file. It has the disadvantage of requiring lengthy file titles and captions on the file folders, such as "Roman Catholic Separate School Board", instead of the shorter "R.C.S.S.B.", and requires everyone to know and follow the particular system in that office when filing and retrieving information. In larger municipalities with more staff this could present problems.

Classification

Every piece of information cannot be contained in its own individual file - it must be grouped. Classification is the setting up of the filing system in some logical arrangement by grouping information into related categories.

The example does not simply file every individual piece of paper, big or small, in separate files. It does not, for example, have a file under "B" for these bulletins. It classifies subjects under broader headings. It has a section titled "Provincial Government", then a file in that section titled "Treasury, Economics, and Intergovernmental Affairs, Ministry of". That file would probably contain information from this Ministry, including these bulletins. (The system is flexible enough to allow you to create a sub-file for these bulletins when you have more of them, or to remove them entirely and put them in a binder, if you find you refer to them often).

Whatever classification grouping is established, it should meet the following criteria. The system should be:

- logical
- understandable
- practical
- simple
- flexible

The major benefit of classification will be the easy filing and retrieval of information from the files.

If you want more information on the broader subject of records management, a publication, produced by the Ministry of Treasury, Economics and Intergovernmental Affairs, entitled "Records Management - A Guide for Municipalities in Ontario" may be obtained from the Ontario Government Bookstore for \$1.50 a copy.

THE ALPHABETIC FILING SYSTEM

Because the alphabet is known to all people, this system has the advantage of being easy to understand and relatively easy to implement. Also, the system is adequate for small filing operations, usually those incorporated into one or two four-drawer filing cabinets. To be most effective, the filing arrangement must be carefully followed by everyone. For example, if the system has a file entitled "Animal Control", information on "Dog Catching", "Canine Control", and so on would be filed under the heading "Animal Control". If all the users do not realize this, it is quite possible to have duplicate files under those different headings. As the number of files increases, the more important become the rules that have been set up and the way the files are controlled. This is one reason why this system does not apply to a very large filing operation, say those having over 1,000 files.

The two main variations of this system are the straight alphabetic and the encyclopedia-alphabetic arrangements. The straight alphabetic approach sets up the files in an arrangement that follows the letters of the alphabet, similar to a dictionary. No attempt is made to group related or similar material together in sections. Personnel files by employee surname, for example, can be filed in a straight alphabetic arrangement.

The encyclopedia-alphabetic variation first groups related material together and then files according to the alphabet. This approach would suit a clerk's or clerk-treasurer's office, especially since this office receives information on a wide variety of subjects.

The sample in the appendix is basically an encyclopedia-alphabetic system. It groups files into major sections (Federal, Provincial, and Municipal Governments and Organizations) and arranges files in alphabetical order within those sections. It is not theoretically "pure" but has been found to be workable.

Again, this variation is only one suggestion. Your own system should reflect your own municipality's needs.

APPENDIXSAMPLE FILING SYSTEMFEDERAL GOVERNMENT (File Guide)*

General Correspondence

Agriculture, Department of

Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation

Employment and Immigration Commission - General

- Summer Employment Programs

- Unemployment Insurance

Member of Parliament (M.P.)

Post Office Canada

Railways - General

- C.N.R.

Secretary of State, Department of - General

- Bilingualism

Statistics Canada

Transport, Department of

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT (file guide)

General Correspondence

Agriculture and Food, Ministry of

Colleges and Universities, Ministry of

Community and Social Services, Ministry of - General

- General Welfare Assistance

- Senior Citizens' Assistance

- Children's Services

* File Guide is a card or support with a suitable caption used to sub-divide file folders into groups.

Consumer and Commercial Relations, Ministry of
- General

- Ontario Building Code
- Ontario Rent Review

Correctional Services, Ministry of

Culture and Recreation, Ministry of - General
- Wintario

Education, Ministry of

Environment, Ministry of the (M.O.E.)

Health, Ministry of - General
- Ontario Hospital Insurance Plan (O.H.I.P.)

Housing, Ministry of

Industry and Tourism, Ministry of (M.I.T.)

Labour, Ministry of

Member of the Ontario Legislature (M.P.P.)

Natural Resources, Ministry of (M.N.R.)

Northern Affairs, Ministry of (M.N.A.)

Ombudsman

Ontario Development Corporation (O.D.C.)

Ontario Housing Corporation (O.H.C.)

Ontario Hydro

Ontario Municipal Board

Revenue, Ministry of - General
- Retail Sales Tax

Solicitor General, Ministry of the
- Fire Marshall
- Ontario Provincial Police

Transportation and Communications, Ministry of (M.T.C.)

Treasury, Economics and Intergovernmental Affairs,
Ministry of (T.E.I.A.) - General
- Background

Workmen's Compensation Board (W.C.B.)

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT (file guide)

Administration (file guide)

General Correspondence

Consultants

Declarations of Office

Elections

Employees - personnel file

Enumeration

Fence Viewing

Insurance

Licencing

Office Equipment

Parking

Parks and Recreation

Planning Board - Minutes and Agendas
- Correspondence

Planning - Committee of Adjustment

Planning - Official Plans

Planning - Subdivisions

Planning - Zoning

Ratepayers Associations

Resolutions from other Municipalities

School Support List

Tenders

Weed Control

Vital Records - Birth, Marriage and Death

Voters List

Finance and Taxes (file guide)

Accounts Payable

Accounts Receivable

Assessment - General

Assessment - Appeals

Assessment - Decisions

Auditor - General

- Year-end Adjustments or Closing Entries

Banking

Budget - Capital and Forecast

Budget - Operating

Capital Borrowing

Financial Reports

Grants and Subsidies

- M.T.C.

- T.E.I.A.

- Working Papers

Tax - General

Tax Arrears

Tax Certificate/Requests

Tax Collectors

Council and Committees of Council (file guide)

Council - General

Council Agendas

Council Committee Minutes and Reports - Duplicates

Council Minutes - Duplicates

Other Local Government Authorities (file guide)

Board of Education

County of _____

Health Unit

Hospital Board

Land Division Committee

Library Board

Regional Municipality of _____

Roman Catholic Separate School Board

Protection Services (file guide)

Animal Control

Building and Plumbing Inspection

Fire

Police - General

Police Commission - Agenda

Police Commission - By-laws

Police Commission - Minutes

Public Works (file guide)

Drainage

Garbage Collection

Garbage Disposal

Local Improvements

Public Utilities - Hydro

Public Utilities - Water

Sanitary Sewers

Sidewalks

Storm Sewers

Streets and Roads - Paving and Grading
Vehicles

ORGANIZATIONS (file guide)

Association of Counties and Regions of Ontario
(A.C.R.O.)

Association of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers
of Ontario (A.M.C.T.O.) - General
- Zone Meetings

Association of Municipalities of Ontario (A.M.O.)

Association of Municipal Tax Collectors of Ontario
(A.M.T.C.O.)

Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators
(C.A.M.A.)

Chamber of Commerce

Community Planning Association of Canada (C.P.A.C.)

Farmer's Union

Federation of Agriculture

Federation of Canadian Municipalities (F.C.M.)

Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities (F.O.N.O.M.)

Institute of Public Administration of Canada (I.P.A.C.)

Municipal Engineers Association (M.E.A.)

Municipal World

Ontario Good Roads Association (O.G.R.A.)

Ontario Humane Society

Ontario Municipal Administrators Association (O.M.A.A.)

Ontario Municipal Electrical Association (O.M.E.A.)

Roads and Transportation Association of Canada (R.T.A.C.)

Rural Ontario Municipal Association (R.O.M.A.)

Tourist Association

Do you want more information on this subject? Ask any of the field officers of the Local Government Division. They are located at these addresses:

OTTAWA

244 Rideau Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 5Y3
(613) 232-9446

SUDBURY

1349 Lasalle Boulevard
Sudbury, Ontario
P3A 1Z2
(705) 566-0901

THUNDER BAY

435 James Street South
P. O. Box 5000
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7C 5G6
(807) 475-1621

LONDON

495 Richmond Street
London, Ontario
N6A 5A9
(519) 438-7255

ORILLIA

15B Matchedash Street North
Orillia, Ontario
L3V 4T4
(705) 325-6144

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